Clinton Cuts Council on Environmental Quality

President Clinton effectively abolished the Council on the Environmental Quality on February 8, saying, "we face urgent environmental and economic challenges that demand a new way of thinking and a new way of organizing our efforts." Clinton has replaced CEQ with a new White House Office of Environmental Policy.

Clinton named Kathleen McGinty, former aide to Vice President Gore, as director of the new Office of Environmental Policy. Although former CEQ chairpersons have enjoyed access to cabinet meetings, McGinty will have the title of deputy assistant to the president, an executive office status not normally included in cabinet sessions. This has some sources worried that McGinty may lack the political clout to focus attention on environmental issues. However, in announcing the new office, Clinton maintained that it would "have broader influence and a more effective and focused mandate to coordinate environmental policy" than the CEQ. McGinty will participate "in each of the major policy councils: the National Security Council, the National Economic Council, and the Domestic Policy Council, and work closely with the relevant federal agencies," Clinton said.

The CEQ was established by the 1970 National Environmental Policy Act, which requires government agencies to prepare environmental impact statements for any project with potential environmental consequences. Along with oversight of environmental impact statements, the CEQ has been responsible for an annual environmental report. There is concern among many that the new, streamlined office will be unable to handle these responsibilities.

In an interview with *Inside EPA*, former CEQ chair Michael Deland said the new office, expected to employ 10–15 staff members as compared with the more than 30 employees of the CEQ, is a "comparatively low-level and woefully understaffed entity." Jay Hair, president of the National Wildlife Federation, has countered that "The CEQ had become weak, ineffective, and virtually irrelevant under Presidents Bush and Reagan." In general, reaction from environmentalists to the announcement of the new office has been positive.

Sources say Clinton is preparing legislation to officially abolish the CEQ. Past efforts to abolish the office by Presidents Carter and Reagan were rejected by Congress, which has so far been supportive but reserved regarding the new Office of Environmental Policy.

The Brain-Immune System Connection

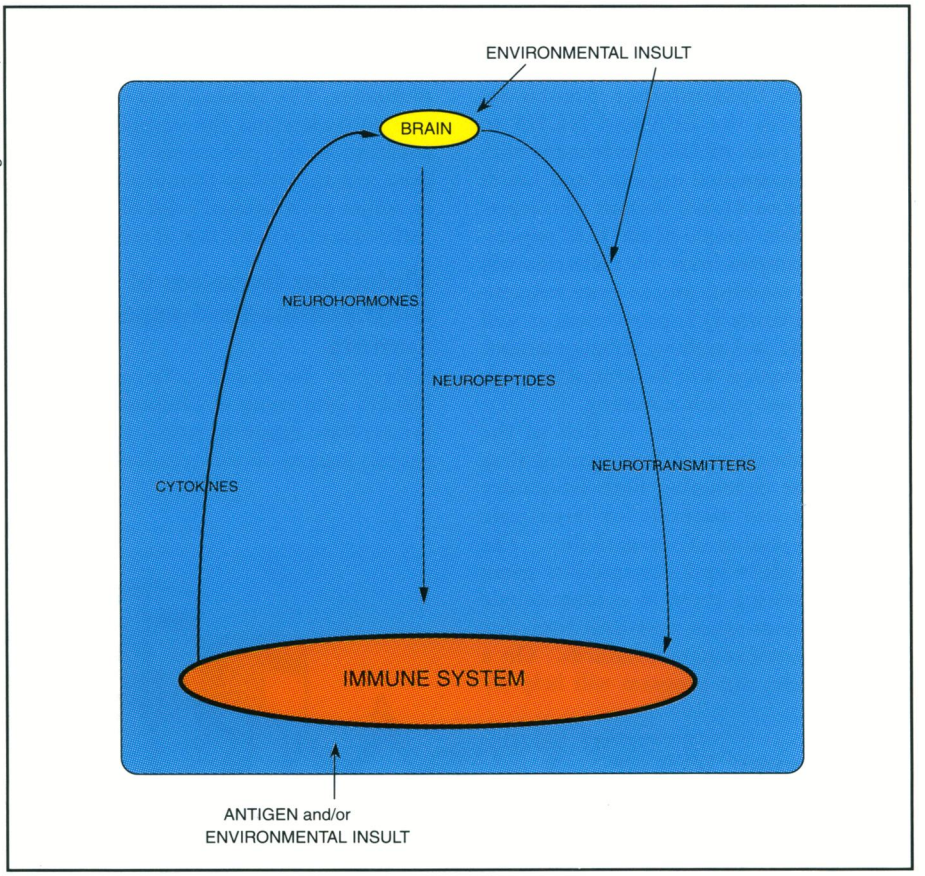
A number of findings have provided increasing evidence for an integrated relationship among the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems. This relationship was the focus of the PBS series "Healing and the Mind," by Bill Moyers, which brought to the public's attention some ideas that scientists are now beginning to explore in the laboratory. These ideas suggest that such a relationship may influence diseases that in the past have been associated with only one system.

Scientists now propose that the environment may indirectly affect normal immune function by directly affecting neuroendocrine or nervous system function; the reverse may also be true. An example is immune dysfunction resulting from a long-term, low-level exposure to environmental contaminants in the workplace or at home. The precise role of such a relationship in the cause or progression of disease states is not yet known.

Until recently, the nervous, endocrine, and immune systems have often been researched as separate disciplines. However, researchers are now recognizing that the models used to study response in one system alone are inadequate for studying the response of a whole organism exposed to an environmental insult. David Felten, professor of neurobiology and anatomy at the University of Rochester and editor of *Brain, Behavior and Immunity*, is designing and testing integrated models. According to Felten, "Autoimmune diseases, such as lupus or rheumatoid arthritis, can be influenced by hormones and neurotransmitters. [This influence may] perhaps provide insight into the role that stressors or environmental insults may play in disease expression or progression."

Research in this area is crucial to the development of potential therapeutic approaches. Felten states, "Our investigations provide evidence for direct connections between the brain and the immune system, with neurotransmitters and neurohormones as important signals acting on receptors on cells in the immune system. Altering such signaling by behavioral and pharmacological interventions holds great promise for novel therapeutic interventions in a wide range of immunologically mediated diseases and conditions."

Virginia Sanders, NIEHS



The Brain–Immune System Connection. An environmental insult may influence the interaction between the brain and the immune system. When an antigen enters the body, the immune system begins to synthesize and release cytokines. Cytokines affect brain function and activate the release of neurohormones, neuropeptides, and neurotransmitters that influence immune function.